

**Scott Smith, Rep. Harry Mitchell**

[East Valley Tribune](#)

Commentary

As Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport officials celebrate 1 million total passengers in just two short years of scheduled passenger service, it is obvious that investing in infrastructure development at the burgeoning airport is a good idea.

### [Gateway serves millionth passenger](#)

We're proud to have worked together to help secure the critical funding needed to expand the passenger terminal and enhance airfield safety and efficiency. We believe these projects will lead to the creation of new high-paying aerospace jobs and facilitate expanded passenger service.

In 2007, some people in the Valley didn't know Gateway Airport was a commercial airport, and even fewer had heard of the new startup airline, Allegiant Air. Much has changed in the past two years:

- Gateway has proven that passenger service can be more than just sustainable but profitable as Allegiant Air continues to post record profits.
- Allegiant Air, operating 150-seat, MD-80 aircraft, initially launched passenger service to eight cities with 20 flights a week in 2007 and has since expanded to serve 20 cities with more than 50 flights a week;
- More than 550,000 total passengers came through Gateway's Charles L. Williams Passenger Terminal in 2009, and airport officials are preparing to accommodate more than 650,000 in 2010.
- In 2009, Allegiant Air's arriving flights delivered an estimated \$69.2 million into the Valley's economy.
- Gateway is bringing new money into Arizona's economy, as a recent study revealed 26 percent of out-of-area visitors would not have visited if Allegiant Air did not provide service.
- New money from Gateway visitors benefits the entire state as 29 percent of them go on to make overnight trips to Arizona locations during their stay - including trips to Sedona, Tucson and the Grand Canyon.
- Gateway also draws passengers from all over Arizona as 20 percent of in-state passengers come from outside the Phoenix metropolitan area traveling to Allegiant destinations.

The vision of Gateway and promise of adding to the quality of life for Valley residents is why we worked hard to secure the funding to construct a new taxiway needed to attract top aerospace companies such as Embraer, Cessna, and Hawker-Beechcraft to the airport.

With the addition of these companies, Allegiant Air, and more than 30 other international aviation employers, Gateway airport generates more than \$534 million in annual economic activity and supports 4,075 jobs in the region. However, the work isn't done yet.

As Allegiant continues to add more flights, the airline is outgrowing the 35,000-square-foot terminal. Construction has already begun on a federally funded \$8.9 million expansion project to add an additional 25,000 square feet of terminal space and increase boarding gates from four to six.

The expanded terminal is just the beginning of the anticipated growth for Gateway. In future years, travelers will arrive and depart from a larger facility on the east side of the airport with freeway access.

Gateway is forecast to accommodate 10 percent of the Valley's total airline passenger service by 2020.

In the midst of economic uncertainties, Gateway continues to expand and thrive, providing jobs, commercial passenger service options, and enhanced general aviation service to Arizona - fulfilling its commercial reliever role in many ways and proving to be a great investment for our region.

*Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., has served in Congress since 2004 representing the 5th Congressional District, which includes western portions of Mesa and Chandler. Mesa*

*Republican Scott Smith has been mayor of Mesa since June 2008.*